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ART. IX.—*The Library of American Biography*, conducted by JARED SPARKS, Vol. VI. Boston. Hilliard, Gray, & Co. 1836. 16mo. pp. 358.

THE present volume of the “*Library of American Biography*” fully sustains the reputation of that very useful and popular work.

It consists of three parts. The first is a brief memoir of that eminent lawyer and orator, William Pinkney of Maryland, by Henry Wheaton, now our Minister Resident in Berlin. Its materials are chiefly drawn, as the author announces in a note, from his larger work, published in 1826, entitled “*Some Account of the Life, Writings, and Speeches of William Pinkney*,” and from an article on that work, in the twenty-fourth volume of our *Journal*. Having treated the subject of Mr. Pinkney’s life and genius at such length before, we have nothing now to say, except that Mr. Wheaton, in the preparation of the present sketch, has manifested his characteristic good sense and good taste, and made a valuable contribution to our means of convenient access to an acquaintance with an illustrious man.

The second part, a *Life* by Professor Channing of Cambridge, of his grandfather, William Ellery, member of the Continental Congress for Rhode Island, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, is a truly delightful composition. It actually practises on us the bewildering delusion of making us feel as if we had known the man. No one whom we ever did know, resembles him at all points; but he remains as perfect an idea in our minds, as if it was an idea obtained by personal familiarity, instead of reading. Every trait is individual. Every touch is graphic. The character is that of an upright, true-hearted, unpretending, energetic man; ambitious of no distinctions, but calm, prudent, and resolved in all exigencies; followed by a confidence which the silent influence of desert has won, and not any care to attract regard; and always making the very best of life, for himself and others. This it is, in a general way of description. But the phases, in which these qualities and dispositions are manifested, are all its own, and brought

out in the memoir with such nature and life, that the outline is cut, as if with steel, on the memory. We cannot, of course, follow the writer in this felicitous narration of facts that individualize a character. We must content ourselves with extracting the following beautiful paragraphs on the true dignity of old age.

“It remains to speak of him in his closing years. It may be supposed, that we are entering upon a distinct era, in which, though he may still be recognised, he must yet be materially changed; that his course must be henceforth downward; and that, with the general feeling of tenderness and veneration for the old, we have now only to observe the decay of what we may have admired in its strength. Such an anticipation, with respect to the aged, is so common, as to be thought natural. But, after all that has been written of old age, is its true value, and the character it may and ought to possess, enough considered? Some speak of a man in years as an object of condescending admiration, that he should have lived so long; and he, in turn, may be pleased with this distinction, and even live the longer for it, as if to protract and augment the honor.

“Sometimes, we make old age picturesque, with its wintry snows and reposing apathy. The harvest is ended, the earth is sealed; there is to be no more growth. Or it is a noble pile, time-honored, time-worn, and falling into slow decay. There is to be no more splendor or cheerfulness, no more of life as it has been, within those walls. Or, again, we make old age sentimental. It is passively and gratefully receiving cheerful tendance from the young; it is patiently recounting its experience, and distilling its long-treasured wisdom; and the children are gathered round the bed of the patriarch for his blessing. And are these the best lights and positions in which we may look on those, who are approaching the appointed boundaries of time?

“There is yet another view of age, in which it appears as a highly moral and intellectual state of man. It may be granted that the senses have lost much of their quickness; but the imagination, now freed from distracting excitement, is as able and disposed as ever to shape anew the materials they have supplied, either for its own solace and delight, or for the beautiful expression of thought and emotion. At the very season when mere animal existence is less a blessing, and the animal spirits have almost ceased to excite and sustain, and passion is no longer to stimulate and crave and be fed, the imagination still lives to animate the purely intellectual exercises, to preserve or restore the

early love of natural beauty, to keep the affections warm and old remembrances distinct; and, indeed, to give the mind much of the light and vivacity of youth.

"It is the period of acquisition as well as of contemplation. A long experience of life has not yet furnished all, nor the best, that can be obtained. Reflection shows that much has been falsely valued, and that the methods of pursuit have often been wrong; so that even a little that is seen and meditated upon in the latter day, may be worth more than masses of crude opinions, fancies, and purposes, which occupied the supposed vigor of life. The mind was often stationary then, from the all-surrounding pressure of outward things, which seemed to make it intensely active, because they wholly engrossed it; but now it may be truly said to be advancing by a power from within. The effort is not merely to keep what has been purchased, and not to recede from a point that has been gained. Life is better even now than a mere resistance of evils. The future is entered upon as offering higher studies, and as a corrector of the past, and with a religious feeling of the importance of the days that remain, as close-bordering on the endless pursuits of another state of action. The temper is softened and spiritualized. Active engagements are still pursued for the good of others, when the motives of self have become feeble. Intimacy with the young is cherished from sympathy with their exuberant spirits, and from a desire to be strengthened by their fresh-growing thoughts, and from a prophetic interest in the life that is before them; an intimacy of perfect equality, except that the aged bend to the young, and give more than they receive. Add to such considerations as these, the blessing of a good nervous system, and health scarcely interrupted or impaired to the end, and some idea may be formed of Mr. Ellery in his closing years." — pp. 130 – 133.

The third memoir is of Cotton Mather, a personage entitled to a place in Mr. Sparks's *American Biography*, by several distinct and acknowledged claims. His early reputation, and the prominent part he took in the ecclesiastical affairs of New England; the great and long-continued consideration which he enjoyed with the people at large; his literary attainments and unquestionable ability of a certain kind; the contributions he made to the materials of our early history, ample at least, if not so exact as might be desired; and last, though not least, his grievous errors of conduct, on several important occasions, give him an undoubted em-

inence above most of his contemporaries, and make him one of the most remarkable characters that belong to the early period of New England. But, though his name is familiar to every mouth, the materials of a full account of his life, are unfortunately scanty. They are sufficient, however, to give a tolerably accurate idea of his course as a public man, and of some leading qualities of his character in private. His public career is so closely connected with the history of the times, that it may be pretty well understood, and his own diaries, divulging his more private course of thought and action, are characteristic in the highest degree. We are glad that the task of collecting these materials, and illustrating Mather's life, has fallen into hands so well able to discharge the duty. Mr. Peabody has clearly used the utmost industry in bringing together all existing information pertaining to his subject. He has woven, from these scattered materials, an exceedingly graceful and lively narration. The current has been lately setting pretty strongly against the reputation of this famous divine; and possibly there has been a general disposition to underrate both his abilities and his moral excellence. Mr. Peabody is a more indulgent judge; and, while he passes a deserved censure upon Mather's bigotry and vanity, and reprobates severely his conduct during the Salem delusion, he is equally solicitous to exhibit the fairer features, that, in his view, marked the man. That he has rightly struck the balance between foibles, faults, and virtues, is more than we would venture to affirm; for, undoubtedly, Mather was one of the *oddest* men, "that ever lived in the tide of times." But his only aim has evidently been to ascertain the exact truth, and state it in the most clear and simple form. The story is told with great beauty of style. It is pleasant, polished, and animated, and occasionally diversified by touches of delightful humor. The narration is interspersed with extracts from the writings of Mather and others, skilfully selected, and tastefully introduced; and the reader's interest never flags, for the writer's spirit never fails.

Cotton Mather was born in Boston, Feb. 12th, 1662-3. His mother was the daughter of John Cotton, a man of the first celebrity in his day. He manifested early in life, a passion for books, and was educated at the free school in

Boston, by Mr. Benjamin Thompson, and by the well-known Mr. Ezekiel Cheever, who prepared him for college. He seems to have gone through an unusual preparatory course; "since we hear," says Mr. Peabody, "of his studying Homer and Isocrates, besides many Latin authors, not very familiar even to those who had taken a degree." The following particulars are interesting, and the curious speech of President Hoar is amusingly characteristic of the age, and of the estimation in which Mather's family was held.

"He entered college at the age of twelve, which was then thought very early, and certainly is too early both for the pursuits and temptations of the place. But he seems to have had a strong ambition, which aided his better principles, in securing him from moral dangers, and making him attentive to his duties. He wished and expected to be a great man; and though expectations of this kind are not often shared by others, in his case, on account of his birth, they were thought appropriate and graceful. When he became a member of the institution, Dr. Hoar, who was then president, gave him according to custom, 'this head for his initial declamation';

"*'Telemacho veniet, vivat modo, fortior ætas.'*

"We have little information concerning his rank in college; but, judging from its close, it must have been sufficiently high; for, when he took his first degree, President Oakes, in his Latin oration at the commencement, expressed himself in a strain, which may be thus translated.

"*'Mather is named Cotton Mather. What a name! But, my hearers, I confess I am wrong; I should have said, what names! I shall say nothing of his reverend father, since I dare not praise him to his face; but should he resemble and represent his venerable grandfathers, John Cotton and Richard Mather, in piety, learning, elegance of mind, solid judgment, prudence, and wisdom, he will bear away the palm; and I trust that in this youth, Cotton and Mather will be united and flourish again.'*

"Such an address, on such an occasion, would now make a considerable sensation. The effect of it was to fan the flame of Mather's ambition, and so to make him what all expected him to be. But it doubtless had another effect, which was to produce much of that jealousy in others, and that discontent in himself, which brought so much unhappiness on his later years. Some poet of the day alluded to what he called his 'ominous name';

"*'Where two great names their sanctuary take,
And in a third combined a greater make.'*

Being blessed, as his son informs us, 'with a modest inquisitiveness,' a gift which is said not to be uncommon in New England, he made rapid advances before taking his second degree, which he received from the hand of his father. The *Thesis*, which he then maintained, was 'the divine origin of the Hebrew points'; but he afterwards saw reason to change his mind, and held the contrary opinion to the last.

"Such a man as Increase Mather would not regard learning and intellectual accomplishments as so important as religious education. His first efforts, therefore, were directed to the formation of a Christian character in his son, who had sufficient fervor and readiness to receive impressions, and wanted the judicious counsel, which his father was well able to give. We are told, that almost as soon as he began to speak, he began to pray, and practised this duty constantly in all his earlier years. He often composed forms for his schoolmates, and recommended the duty to them. He frequently reprov'd them for profaneness and misconduct, and set them the example of avowing his religious principles fearlessly on all proper occasions; a kind of moral courage, which, if it were more generally found in the young, would save many from ruin; for the truth is, that many are led away, not merely against their judgment, but actually against their will, for the want of firmness to bear up under the ridicule of those, whose good opinion they would not value." — pp. 172-174.

Though Mather was destined to the clerical profession, both by his own tastes, and by hereditary influences, he occupied himself in teaching, seven years after leaving college. He had under his instruction many young men, who afterwards rose to distinction; and he used to say, that he "would give all he was worth in the world, for the measure of grace and sense, which he saw in some that were once his scholars." In 1680, he was invited by the North Church in Boston, to become his father's associate in the ministry; and in 1684, he was regularly ordained pastor. As a preacher he seems to have been highly acceptable, and found, as he expressed it, "strange respect among the people of God," to such a degree that he candidly confesses that "proud thoughts fly-blowned his best performances." The details of his professional labors are extremely interesting and characteristic, but we must refer the reader to the volume itself.

The following account of his mode of turning common incidents to matter for edification, is striking.

"The disposition to derive improvement from all circumstances, for himself and others, attended him through life; and though it was always sincere, it did not always manifest itself in the most judicious and edifying manner. He determined early in life to let no suggestion pass by him; and many, which most men would never have thought of turning to purposes of instruction, were welcomed as excitements of devotion in his soul.

"When the common business of the household was going on, he was led into spiritual meditations. If they happened to be brewing, he would say, 'Lord, let us find in a glorious Christ a provision for our thirsty souls;' when baking, 'Lord, let a glorious Christ be the bread of life unto us;' and on the washing-day, which is not apt to bring the mind into a devotional frame, he would say, 'O, wash us thoroughly from sin! O, take away our filthy garments from us.' These ejaculations were provided and used on all such occasions.

"So in all his personal actions. Late in his life he writes in his Diary, 'The snuffing of my candle is a frequent action with me. I have provided a great number of pertinent wishes and thoughts, and prayers and praises, to be formed upon the occurrences in my life, which afford occasions for them.' It must have been by an oversight that this action was so long omitted. For all his mature life he had been accustomed, when he wound up his watch, to bless God for another day, and pray that it might be spent to his glory. When he heard a clock strike, he would pray that he might so number his days, as to apply his heart unto wisdom. When he knocked at a door, he used it as an occasion for reviving the memory of the promise, 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' When he mended his fire, it was with a prayer that his love and zeal might be kindled into a flame. When he put out his candle on retiring to rest at night, it was with an address to the Father of lights, that his light might not go out in darkness. When he paid a debt, he reflected, that he should owe no man any thing but love.

"He bore upon his mind a great number of ejaculatory prayers, prepared for the occasions when they were to be used. As a specimen, those which were sometimes used at table may be given. Looking on the gentlewoman that carved for the guests, he said to himself, 'Lord, carve a rich portion of thy graces and comforts to that person.' Looking on a gentlewoman stricken in years, 'Lord, adorn that person with the virtues which thou prescribest for aged women.' For one lately

married, 'Lord, marry and espouse that person to thyself in a covenant never to be forgotten.' For a gentlewoman very beautiful, 'Lord give that person an humble mind, and let her be most concerned for those ornaments that are of great price in thy sight.'

"So when he walked the streets, he implored secret blessings upon those, who passed by him. At the sight of a tall man, he said, 'Lord, give that man high attainments in Christianity., For a lame man, 'Lord, help that man to walk uprightly.' For a negro, 'Lord, wash that poor soul; make him white by the washing of thy spirit.' For a very little man, 'Lord, bestow great blessings on that man.' For young gentlewomen, 'Lord, make them wise virgins, and as polished stones in thy temple.' For a man going by without observing him, 'Lord, I pray thee help that man to take a due notice of Christ.' For a very old man, 'Lord, make him an old disciple.' For a wicked man, 'Lord, rescue that poor man, who, it is to be feared, is possessed by Satan, who leads him captive.'

"When he had a family, he taught his children, in like manner to use the incidents of life as so many suggestions from on high. Some years after this he writes; 'Two of my children have been newly scorched with gunpowder, wherein, though they have received a merciful deliverance, yet they undergo a smart that is considerable. I must improve this occasion to inculcate lessons of piety upon them; especially with relation to their danger of everlasting burnings.' " — pp. 191 – 194.

The second chapter gives us an entertaining account of Mather's courtship and marriage, with a minute sketch of his proceedings in the business of witchcraft. The political history of the colony, upon which the Mathers exercised considerable influence at that time, is also rapidly treated. The peculiarities of Mather are perhaps more conspicuous in this portion of his life, than in any other. His curious superstition, and his formal observances, seem to have had then more occasion for their display than at other times; at any rate, the relation of them presents a strange jumble of grotesque absurdities, in the midst of scenes of ferocious bigotry and tragical delusions. We pass to Mather's affecting account of his wife's death.

"'The black day arrives! I had never seen so black a day in all the time of my pilgrimage. The desire of my eyes is this day to be taken from me. Her death is lingering and painful. All the forenoon of this day, she was in the pangs of death,

and sensible till the last minute or two before her final expiration. I cannot remember the discourse that passed between us; only her devout soul was full of satisfaction about her going to a state of blessedness with the Lord Jesus Christ. As far as my distress would permit, I studied to confirm her satisfaction and consolation. When I saw to what a point of resignation I was called of the Lord, I resolved, with his help, to glorify him. So, two hours before she expired, I kneeled by her bedside, and took into my hands that dear hand, the dearest in the world, and solemnly and sincerely gave her up to the Lord. I gently put her out of my hands and laid away her hand, resolved that I would not touch it again. She afterwards told me, that she signed and sealed my act of resignation; and before that though she had called for me continually, after it, she never asked for me any more. She conversed much until near two in the afternoon. The last sensible word that she spoke was to her weeping father; "Heaven, Heaven will make amends for all!" — p. 272.

Mr. Mather records a great many struggles he had with the Devil; but it strikes us that the following is the most perilous of all his encounters with the wiles of the arch enemy.

"There was a young lady, whom he describes as so remarkably accomplished, that no one in America exceeded her, abounding in wit and sense, with a comely aspect, and most winning conversation, who, after writing to him once or twice, made him a visit, and gave him to understand, that she had long felt a deep interest in his ministry, and that, since his present condition had given her more liberty to think of him, 'she had become charmed with my person to such a degree, that she could not but break in upon me with her most importunate requests, that I would make her mine.' She however declared, that the chief interest she felt in the attachment arose from her desire for religious improvement; for, if she were once connected with him, she did not doubt that her salvation would be secured.

"To a proposal so direct and flattering, it was not easy to make any other than a grateful reply. It was not altogether to his taste, but he could not say so to her. All at once, a way of escape seemed to be offered; and, nothing doubting that it would answer the purpose, he told her of his austere manner of life, and the frequent fasts and vigils, which his wife was expected to share. But, instead of being daunted by this communication, she told him that this was the very thing of all others, which she desired; for she had already weighed all those discouragements, but was prepared with faith and fortitude to encounter them all.

“ ‘Then,’ he says, ‘I was in a great strait how to treat so polite a gentlewoman, thus applying herself unto me. I plainly told her I feared whether her proposal would not meet with insurmountable objections from those, who had an interest in disposing of me. However, I desired that there might be time taken to see what would be the wisest and fittest resolution. In the mean time, if I could not make her my own, I should be glad to be any way instrumental in making her the Lord’s.’

“ Having secured this reprieve, he seemed to breathe freely, though he was utterly unable to discover any way of escape from this affectionate persecution.

“ This matter appears for some time to have oppressed his very soul, and the manner in which he treats it is too characteristic to be passed by. After a time, the *Diary* proceeds; ‘My sore distresses and temptations I this day carried before the Lord. The chief of them lies in this. The most accomplished gentlewoman, mentioned, though not by name, in the close of the former year, one whom everybody sees with admiration, confessed to be, for her charming accomplishments, an incomparable person, addressing me to make her mine, and professing a disposition unto the most holy flights of religion to lie at the bottom of her addresses, I am in the greatest strait imaginable what course to steer. Nature itself causes in me a mighty tenderness towards a person so amiable. Breeding requires me to treat her with honor and respect, and very much of deference; but religion, above all, obliges me, instead of a rash rejecting of her conversation, to contrive rather how I may imitate the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ in the dealing with such as are upon a conversion to him.’ No contrivance could arrange the matter to his mind: for again he says, ‘As for my special, soul-harassing affair, I did, some days ago, under my hand, beg, as for my life, that it might be desisted from, and that I might not be killed by hearing any more about it.’ But even his written solicitations produced no effect, so desirous was she to secure the welfare of her soul.” — pp. 273 – 276.

We should be glad to make further extracts from this agreeable book; but the lateness of the hour when the sheets were placed in our hands forbids. Nor is it necessary to say any thing further; the interest of the subject, and the beauty of the narrative will give it an immediate popularity and wide circulation.
